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Henry Waxman's Retirement: Though He Never 'Went Hollywood,' the Industry Loses a Strong Liberal Backer

MEDIA | By Ira Teinowitz on January 30, 2014 @ 5:23 pm

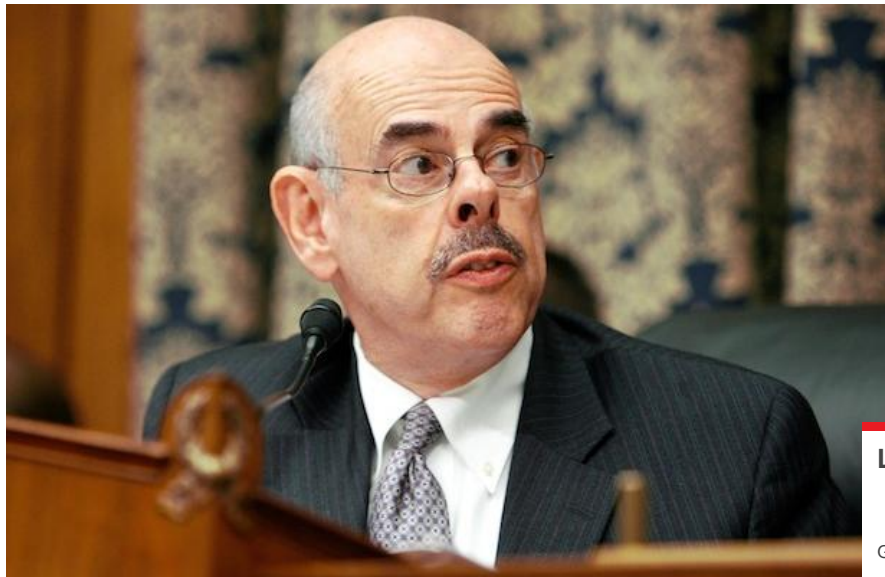
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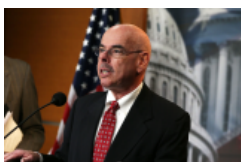
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Rep. Henry Waxman's **pending retirement from Congress** will not only leave Hollywood without its steady liberal lion in Washington, but also removes a strong proponent on a range of issues that affect the industry, from Net Neutrality to media consolidation.

Waxman worked to delay the switch to digital television when problems cropped up, helped provide another avenue for wireless providers to buy more time and in recent weeks expressed concerns about plans of the Tribune Co. to spin off its newspapers including the Los Angeles Times. In Washington, Waxman, now the ranking Democrat on the House Energy and Commerce Committee, is best known as often vociferous advocate in long-running consumer battles over issues ranging from tobacco advertising to Food and Drug Administration oversight to environmental legislation.



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Diminutive in size, the 74-year-old Waxman never exactly "went Hollywood" in his nearly 40 years in Congress — many of his more public battles were on liberal or consumer issues — though his constituents included the denizens of Beverly Hills and the West side. But he was a fierce fighter who and a "public powerhouse" who would go down as "one of the greatest legislators" in U.S. history, said Sen. Ed Markey, D-Mass., who as a House member regularly co-sponsored legislation with Waxman.

"Henry is fearless and fair, a phenomenal fighter for consumers across our country. I am proud to call him my friend for four decades," Markey said Thursday.

Waxman for years sponsored legislation to restrict tobacco advertising and marketing, often with another liberal lion, Sen. Ted Kennedy. It took years, but the legislation finally became law. In one memorable hearing he brought the heads of tobacco companies to Capitol Hill, had them stand and swore them in, then repeatedly asked each whether nicotine was addictive.

He supported a number of efforts to increase federal agencies over food and drug products, to reform the health care system, to increase federal efforts to resolve various women's issues and on several environmental and climate change issues. He also was very active and a key negotiator in the fight for the Affordable Care Act.

Though Hollywood-related issues weren't his main focus, Waxman did find himself advocating for the industry at times: When legislators in the face of Janet Jackson's Super Bowl "wardrobe malfunction" moved to greatly raise potential fines for TV stations, Waxman pushed back, suggesting it was parents rather than the federal government who should determine indecency.

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On Net Neutrality, Waxman worked unsuccessfully in 2010 to craft a compromise between internet service providers and consumer groups who feared the changes would limit new competition. And he raised questions about the impact of media consolidation and pressed the Federal Communications Commissions about moves to allow media companies to more easily buy multiple TV stations in a market.

In 2009, Waxman pushed for a four-month delay in the country's transition from analog to digital TV. Working with fellow California Democrat Anna Eshoo, Waxman also pushed spectrum reforms that could open the door to wireless providers getting more spectrum currently used for TV.

Waxman's advocacy often put him at odds with Republicans, and sometimes with Democrats. In 2008, Waxman ousted Rep. John Dingell, D-Mich., as chair of the House Energy and Commerce Committee in part because Dingell wasn't doing enough on energy and climate issues.

Thursday, however, both Republicans and Democrats praised Waxman.

"I have spent 27 years sitting across the dais from him," said Rep. Joe Barton, R-Texas, former chairman of the House Energy and Commerce Committee. "During that time we had some memorable clashes and we worked together on monumental legislation. Henry's work ethic is unparalleled and his intelligence nearly unmatched. His passion was always on display when he was fighting for an issue he believed in."

President Obama praised Waxman in a statement.

"Thanks to Henry's leadership, Americans breath cleaner air, drink cleaner water, eat safer food, purchase safer products, and, finally, have access to quality, affordable healthcare," he said in a statement. "Henry will leave behind a legacy as an extraordinary public servant and one of the most accomplished legislators of his or any era."

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